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Chinese Diplomacy Since Afghanistan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While concerned about the implications of events in South-west Asia for regional security, China also sees the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as an opportunity to counter detente politics in the West, prod the United States into a tougher anti-Soviet stance, and drive a wedge between the Third World and the Soviet Union. China is seeking to capitalize on this opportunity by lobbying for greater Western involvement in the security of the region, offering its own assurances of support to Pakistan, encouraging rapprochement between New Delhi and Islamabad while attempting to repair its own ties with India, and calling on the international community to aid the Afghan resistance. []

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In Southeast Asia, China remains as committed as ever to waging a protracted struggle against Vietnam despite recent indications that ASEAN support for its policy on Kampuchea is eroding. In Northeast Asia, China continues to stress its interest in maintaining stability on the Korean Peninsula and its support for an increased Japanese defense effort. []

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As a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the strong US reaction, China has reduced further its meager relations with the USSR. The Chinese have signaled their satisfaction with Sino-US ties and insist that they see the relationship as "a major strategic decision" and not as a "tactical move" born of expediency. []

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This memorandum was prepared under the auspices of the National Intelligence Officer for China - East Asia - Pacific by the China Branch, East Asia - Pacific Division, Office of Political Analysis, National Foreign Assessment Center. Comments and queries are welcome and should be directed to the NIO/CH-EAP, []

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DISCUSSION

1 Since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan at the end of last year, Chinese attention has focused on the situation in Southwest Asia. Sino-Soviet relations and Sino-Vietnamese relations--traditional areas of high concern--have been relatively static, although Beijing has been active in non-Communist Southeast Asia, whose anti-Vietnamese resolve it fears may be eroding. In recent months, China has continued to stress repeatedly its interest in peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The visit of British Defense Minister Pym in March underscored both China's growing security relationship with the West and its reluctance to move ahead with major arms purchases. []

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SOUTHWEST ASIA

2 China views the recent events in Southwest Asia as both a threat and an opportunity. While concerned about what these events bode for itself and its friends, China has seized upon the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as an opportunity to counter detente politics in the West, prod the US into a tougher anti-Soviet stance, and drive a wedge between the Third World and the Soviet Union--three key Chinese foreign policy objectives. []

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2 China's goal ultimately is to create an anti-Soviet front in Southwest Asia that is supported by the West and open to Chinese influence. The Chinese are prepared to pursue this objective over the long term and to resist tendencies in the international community to reach an accommodation with the Soviets. []

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2 Given the importance they attach to the situation in Afghanistan, the Chinese are concerned that the United States is too preoccupied with Iran. While sympathizing with the US position, Beijing believes Washington must subordinate feelings about the hostages to larger geopolitical concerns. Beijing argues that measures that would destabilize Iran further--such as economic sanctions or military action--only play into the hands of the Soviet Union, the force in the region the United States should be most concerned about. []

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Beijing believes recent American actions in Iran have diverted world attention from the more important situation in Afghanistan, which the Chinese see as having global implications. Beijing sees Moscow's action not as a defensive move

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2 designed to ensure a friendly regime on its border, but as part of a long-range drive to gain a warm-water port on the Indian Ocean. China concludes that after "digesting" Afghanistan, Moscow will pursue this end by supporting separatist movements in the region, such as that of the Baluchis, exploiting the chaos in Iran to bring a pro-Soviet party to power, or even threatening military intervention in Pakistan and Iran. Ultimately Moscow seeks to establish a stranglehold on the Persian Gulf, control access to the Indian Ocean via the Straits of Malacca, and thereby threaten access by the West and Japan to Middle East oil. If Moscow succeeds, Beijing argues, the West can only acquiesce in Soviet world hegemony or precipitate a world war that Moscow is better prepared to wage. []

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1 China is particularly concerned that events in Afghanistan will influence events in Southeast Asia, where it has a direct security stake. It fears that acquiescence in Soviet actions in Afghanistan will lead to acquiescence in the Vietnamese conquest of Kampuchea. China's public [] statements have stressed that the two situations are twin aspects of a single Soviet threat and must be met with equal determination. []

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2 Beijing believes that the outcome in Afghanistan will set the tone in world politics for years to come and the Soviet intervention poses a fundamental test. It sees the application of the Brezhnev doctrine outside the Soviet bloc as a signal of a more adventurist and bellicose Soviet foreign policy. Beijing is concerned that fears of increased tension, domestic political investment in detente, and a distaste for sanctions against Moscow will lead Western nations to seek an accommodation on Afghanistan that will only encourage Moscow to act coercively elsewhere. []

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Regional Strategy

Beijing's efforts to exploit and check Soviet expansion in Southwest Asia long predate the Soviet invasion. While it has been pursuing the key elements of its current strategy with consistency since 1978, the Soviet invasion has caused Beijing to redouble its efforts. The key elements are discussed below.

20 4 Engage the West in the Region. Increased Western involvement in the region's security, particularly on the part of the United States, is at the heart of China's present strategy. Beijing has been particularly eager that Washington provide Islamabad with a security commitment as well as economic and military assistance. The Chinese applauded when the United

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5 States announced it would resume aid to Pakistan. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Reassure Pakistan. China moved quickly to reassure Pakistan of its support after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan.

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[REDACTED] The Chinese have lobbied in the West extensively on Pakistan's behalf, but Beijing's own commitment to Islamabad falls short of Pakistani desires; [REDACTED]

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Encourage Regional Harmony. A newly stressed element in China's regional policy has been to seek to improve its own bilateral relations with India and Iran and to minimize regional conflicts that complicate increased cooperation against the Soviet Union. Beijing has publicly signaled its interest in better relations with New Delhi, such as in its treatment of India's National Day and its unexpectedly warm congratulations to Indira Gandhi, an old adversary, on her reelection. Foreign Minister Huang Hua pressed China's interest in improved ties during his brief meeting with her in Salisbury in April. China has also taken special care in its dealings with Pakistan to avoid irritating India needlessly; for instance, China has been silent on the Kashmir issue. Through public comments and private contacts, Beijing is also laboring to refurbish its relations with Tehran and after many months of effort managed to restore its ambassadorial presence there. [REDACTED]

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2 Bog the USSR Down in Afghanistan. While pursuing these various efforts to develop countervailing forces against the Soviets, China seeks to get the USSR bogged down in Afghanistan and to extract from Moscow the greatest political price possible for the intervention. Beijing has supported the Olympic boycott and welcomed the economic sanctions imposed by Washington, and has called on the West to provide "active" support to the resistance, including both arms and political support. 25X1

1 China's own effort on behalf of the insurgents is unclear. Beijing apparently has sought Islamabad's assistance in supplying Chinese aid through Pakistan. 25X1

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2 Beijing sees the various schemes for neutralizing Afghanistan as a threat to its policy. 25X1

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2 To counter the EC proposal China has put forward its own plan. Its key points, however, are such that they virtually preclude a political settlement: Beijing insists on a total

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Soviet withdrawal without conditions, self-determination for the Afghan people, and active Western support to the rebel forces in the meantime. []

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Policy Constraints

Despite the intensity of Beijing's effort, there are fundamental constraints on China's ability to forge a firm anti-Soviet front in Southwest Asia and to engage the West in its support: []

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-- To the degree China strengthens Pakistan, it runs the risk of impairing efforts to improve relations with India. []

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-- Deference to New Delhi's sensitivities generates suspicions in Islamabad. []

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-- China's support for a stronger US role in the region is opposed by both India and Iran. []

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-- China has little in the way of aid it can offer as a positive inducement, while any display of China's military strength is counterproductive. []

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China may also find that the key actors in its policy are unwilling or unable to play their assigned role. []

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Pakistan. Islamabad is an increasingly weak link in Chinese policy. The Pakistani domestic political scene is currently quiet, but there is widespread discontent with President Zia's rule, even among his military backers. The country is poor and militarily weak and its leaders are pondering how to deal with the pressures from the West, Moscow, and the nonaligned and Islamic world. Rather than readily accepting the vigorous anti-Soviet role Beijing has hoped it would play, Pakistan is attempting to strike the best deal it can for itself. China's ability to strengthen its longtime friend and shape its foreign policy will continue to be limited. []

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Iran. The prospect that Iran will be able to play the strong anti-Soviet role Beijing would like is even less clear. The possibility that China will establish influence in Tehran in the near future is also remote. Beijing has little to offer Iran in the way of inducements, and anti-Communist Islamic fundamentalism will limit Chinese influence under the best of

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circumstances. China is using the few assets it can muster to win influence in Tehran; it has maintained trade, sent a Chinese Muslim delegation, and generally tilted toward Iran in its recent media coverage of events there. Tehran, however, still resents Beijing's support for the Shah, and has not yet sent an ambassador to Beijing. []

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India. The prospects for significant improvement in Sino-Indian relations are fair in the long run, but the chances of rapid improvement in the near term are not great. There remain a number of bilateral issues that divide the countries--including a difficult border dispute--and a strong heritage of bitterness in India stemming from the 1962 border war and subsequent manifestations of Chinese hostility. Beijing has been willing to negotiate all issues. It now believes it is up to India to reciprocate China's overtures of good will and invite Foreign Minister Huang Hua to New Delhi. While the atmospherics are better and while India has expressed interest in improving ties, New Delhi has put off a Huang visit at least until the second half of 1980 and has taken few concrete measures to improve relations. []

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United States. For China, the question of US will and determination is crucial, and Beijing is aware that a variety of factors complicate US involvement in the region. On the one hand, it is pleased by the enhanced US presence in the Indian Ocean and other military moves. On the other, it is aware of US domestic factors, such as the elections, that could cause "vacillation and hesitation" in implementing tougher policies. Moreover, Beijing is aware that US involvement in Southwest Asia is complicated by Pakistan's uncertainty about the value of the US connection. []

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SOUTHEAST ASIA

The Chinese remain as committed as ever to waging a protracted struggle against Vietnam. The ASEAN position on the Kampuchea question has grown slightly more ambiguous, and the new government in Bangkok may be less willing--especially over the longer term--to cooperate fully with Beijing in maintaining the anti-Vietnamese resistance in Kampuchea. China continues to provide military and diplomatic assistance to Pol Pot and to oppose vigorously anything that might lead to a compromise solution. Although China has few illusions about Pol Pot's long-term prospects, it believes that if Vietnamese influence--and by extension, Soviet influence--is to be contained in the region, existing ASEAN support for Democratic Kampuchea (DK) must stand firm. []

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1 Foreign Minister Huang Hua lobbied hard for these views
2 during his swing through Southeast Asia in mid-March but had
22 only limited success. [REDACTED]
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1 China has shown particular concern that the new government
23 will cut its clandestine pipeline to Pol Pot. Soon after
[REDACTED]

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1 While in Bangkok, Huang will undoubtedly make a determined
effort to forestall any Thai overture toward Vietnam. He will
probably stress that Vietnam, not China, constitutes the most
serious and immediate threat to Thailand and that Bangkok risks
its security if it tries to reach an accommodation with Hanoi.
Huang also will probably bring promises of increased Sino-Thai
economic relations, including more petroleum exports to
Thailand. [REDACTED]

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NORTHEAST ASIA

24 In talks with Americans, Japanese, and others, the Chinese
25 have sought to convey a message that they share an interest in
maintaining stability on the Korean Peninsula and that the
north does not pose a threat to the south. China's effort to
expand relations with the United States and Japan has strained
Sino - North Korean relations, [REDACTED]
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Beijing has welcomed Pyongyang's recent initiatives that resulted in the current North-South contacts, as they serve China's interest in promoting stability on the peninsula.

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Beijing has stressed that reunification is a long-term development that could require a hundred years. The Chinese, moreover, have assured both the United States and Japan that they will not support a northern attack on the south.

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There are limits to how far China can reorient its Korean policy and maintain its leverage in Pyongyang. China is concerned that the Soviet Union might attempt to exploit Sino-Korean differences to increase its influence in Pyongyang. While China has been receptive to indirect trade contacts with South Korea, Beijing continues to rule out any cross-recognition formula.

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In regard to Japan, the Chinese continue to stress the importance of US-Japanese security ties based on the Mutual Defense Treaty; they also are encouraging the Japanese to strengthen their own defense capabilities.

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SINO-SOVIET RELATIONS

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the resulting stronger US military posture have caused China to reduce its meager relations with the USSR while expanding contacts with the United States. Political changes within China have reinforced this trend, and the Chinese have made a point of asserting their commitment to a long-term, strategic relationship with the United States.

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2 The Soviet invasion produced an immediate and sharp reaction in China. The Chinese issued a rare Government Statement, summoned the Soviet Ambassador to warn that China considered its security to be jeopardized, and published commentary likening the action to the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia--an event that helped jolt China out of the isolation of the Cultural Revolution. []

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2 Beijing did not at first go beyond heating up its rhetoric against the Soviets, however, presumably wanting to assess the American reaction to the invasion during Secretary Brown's visit to Beijing in early January. On the broader strategic plane, Beijing also wanted to assess the depth of the stronger US commitment to resisting Soviet expansionism. Both in the course of the visit and afterward, Beijing signaled its satisfaction, and the subsequent visit to the United States by Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Wenjin and the projected Geng Biao visit confirm the Chinese desire to regularize consultations with the United States. []

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2 As a measure of its favorable assessment of the Brown visit in particular and the response to Afghanistan in general, Beijing indefinitely postponed the second round of political negotiations with the USSR expected to open this spring. This ended the phase in Sino-Soviet relations, begun in April 1979, that had for a time raised the prospect of improvements in relations. []

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33 China also decided to lend indirect support to the US grain boycott of the Soviet Union. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs reportedly asked China's foreign trade apparatus to increase purchases of US grain to that end. Other evidence indicates that China's traders were already attracted by favorable market conditions resulting from the boycott, but the net effect benefited the US effort. []

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2 On 1 February, the Chinese announced their support for the Olympics boycott and pledged to work with other countries to shift the site of the games. This decision followed by less than a week the US announcement of willingness to sell China communications and other equipment having military application. []

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After the Deng-dominated party plenum in late February the Chinese leadership went to considerable lengths to demonstrate implacability toward the Soviets. Moreover, in an authoritative expression of approval of the US response to Afghanistan a

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2 25 March People's Daily editorial said US-Soviet contention is "irreversible" even though Washington occasionally "vacillates" due to American domestic politics. []

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2 These developments were summed up in an interview that Deng Xiaoping gave to an American journalist in circumstances loaded with symbolism for Sino-Soviet relations. On the day the 1950 Sino-Soviet treaty expired, 11 April, Deng told the US reporter that he was "satisfied" with US-China relations, which "are no tactical move, no matter of expediency or short term duration but a major strategic decision." Deng reportedly made no mention of the Sino-Soviet treaty, but his remarks effectively turned aside a vague Soviet public proposal, made earlier in the week, to reopen border or political negotiations. []

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2 In another anti-Soviet signal, the Chinese on 30 April held a protest rally in a county along the USSR's Central Asian border where an incident had occurred last summer. In an apparent political gesture, the Soviets had chosen 14 February, the anniversary of the Sino-Soviet treaty, as the date to return a Chinese citizen captured during the incident, but Beijing pointedly used the rally to play up Soviet "perfidy." []

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The Chinese have not, however, completely surrendered their maneuverability in the strategic triangle. Even as Deng spoke in sharply critical terms of Soviet foreign policy, he would not rule out reopening talks with Moscow sometime in the future: "Of course, at an appropriate time when it is necessary, there may still be some discussions." In this way China can reopen a channel for communication with the Soviets to help manage tensions. []

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34 The Chinese have also continued routine state-to-state dealings with the Soviets. Beijing sent a new Ambassador to Moscow on 20 April, which was about the time he had been scheduled to depart when his appointment first became known in December. Ambassador Yang Shouzheng has had extensive experience in Africa; we have no record of any previous work on Soviet issues. Both Chinese and Soviet reporting of his assignment was routine. []

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35 Similarly, trade talks are under way in Beijing. A Chinese official in Moscow said in late March that the Soviets have again failed to include in the annual trade list certain items, including power generators and coal processing equipment, that Beijing has long sought. The official ventured the

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"personal" view that the Chinese would retaliate by reducing available exports for the USSR. No figures on actual quantities proposed are yet available. An agreement nonetheless appears likely soon. []

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2 Finally, in March Beijing reached its annual technical agreement with Moscow on management of the navigation channels in the rivers along their borders. This type of agreement has become so routine that it would have significance in assessing Sino-Soviet relations only if it were not achieved. []

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WESTERN EUROPE

1 China continues to open new doors and to expand old ties with Western Europe, primarily to encourage a stronger, more unified anti-Soviet stance, but also to obtain the technology and goods necessary to modernize its civilian economy and armed forces. So far, China has had only limited success in pushing its hard diplomatic line; trade levels are generally increasing, but except for a limited number of low-level, nonlethal military equipment purchases, China has not yet concluded a major arms deal. []

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32 The official visit in late March by British Defense Secretary Francis Pym is indicative of the state of China's putative military relationship with the West. No agreement was reached on the longstanding negotiations for the sale of the Harrier jump-jet--the Chinese cited its high price--and indeed the British now seem to have all but given up hope for the deal. The Chinese told Pym that China now seeks to modernize its own existing military equipment and to acquire new technology rather than make large purchases of the finished products. Nonetheless, Beijing remains interested in military exchanges. The British announced a Royal Navy port call to Shanghai in September and an agreement for a future visit by the Royal Air Force Central Flying School. []

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